

MINING COAL: AN IMPORTANT THURSTON COUNTY INDUSTRY 100 YEARS AGO

James S. Hannum, M.D.

Although coal is becoming less important in the 21st Century U.S. economy, it was a growing industry in this region 100 years ago. Perhaps the most important factor stimulating the increased use of coal, back then, was development of an efficient system of transportation and distribution. County roads were being improved, making wagon delivery of locally-mined coal feasible. Of greater significance was the presence of railroads, making it possible to ship bulk coal economically to distant locations. In that capacity, several Thurston County logging railroads also served as the originating carrier for carloads of coal.

This article will examine the six major coal-producing sites in Thurston County: the region east of Bucoda, the Black Bear Mine, the Great Western Mine, the Skookumchuck Mine, the Majestic Mine, and the largest one, the Washington Union Coal Company Mine at Tono. Keeping track of the various

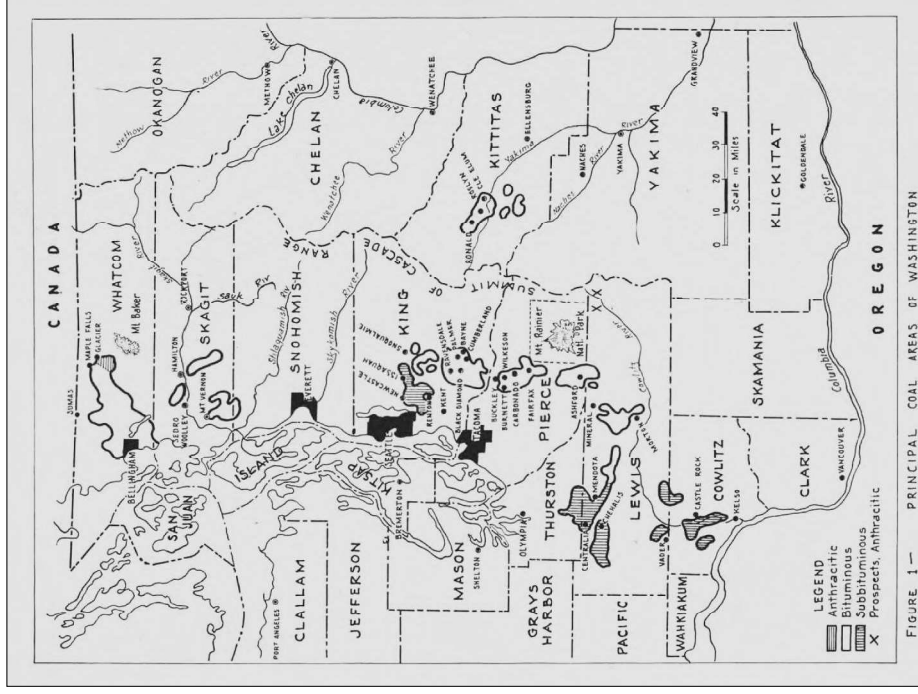


Figure 1. Map of Principal Coal Areas of Washington. Stephen H. Green, Coal and Coal Mining in Washington. Olympia: Department of Conservation and Development, Division of Mines and Mining, 1943, between pages 8 and 9.

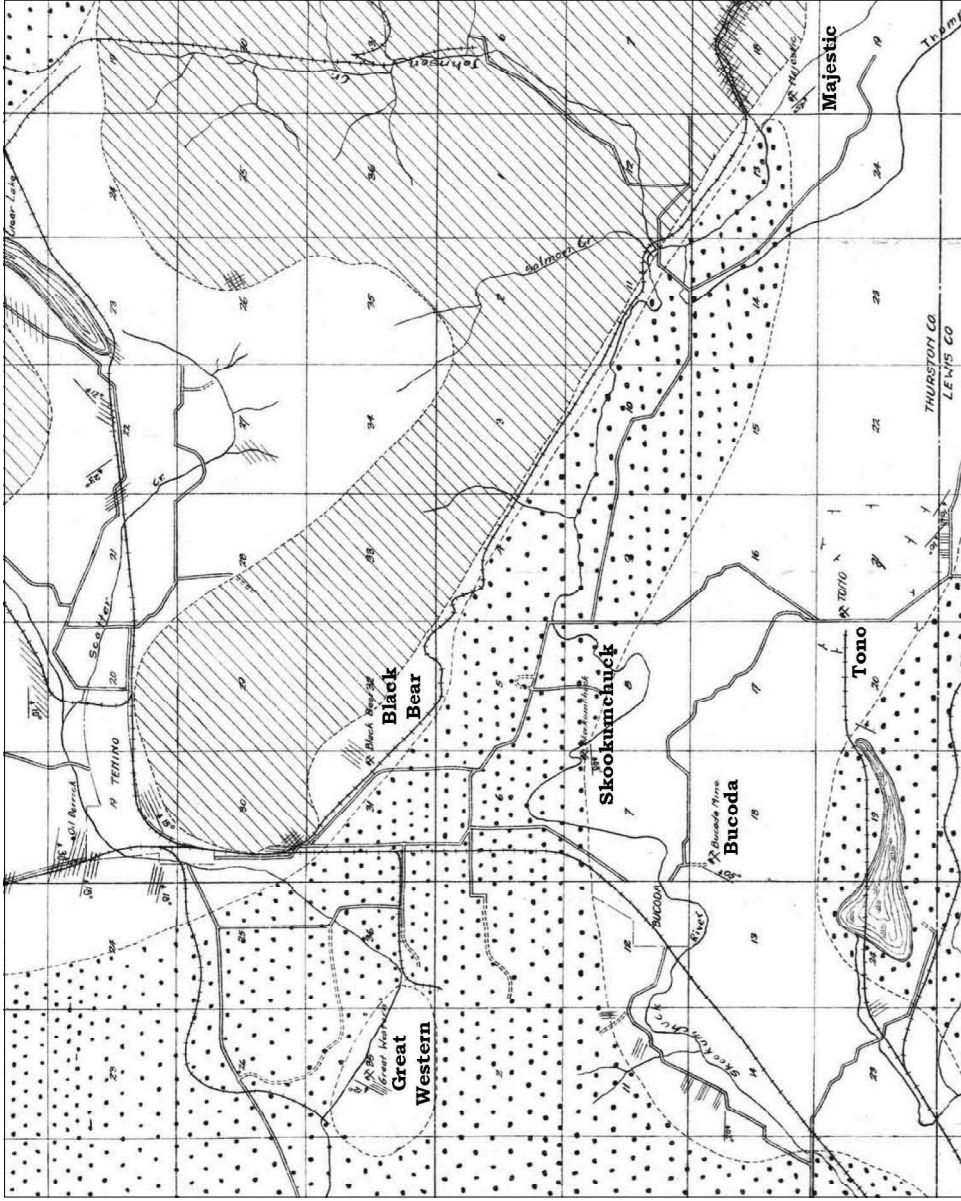


Figure 2. Map of Coal Mines in the Tenino-Mendota Area. Harold E. Culver, Bulletin No. 19—The Coal Fields of Southwestern Washington. Olympia: Washington Geological Survey, 1919, between pages 78 and 79.

operators at these sites can be difficult, for the coal business has always been cyclic. Names for the companies operating at these sites have changed frequently, and often, individual mines were closed for periods of time, sometimes for years, before reopening when demand picked up.

Geologically, coal deposits exist in a belt running north to south, primarily

on the west side of the Cascade Mountains. This is illustrated in Figure 1. In Thurston County, coal was first discovered in the valley of the Skookumchuck River in 1855.¹ The primary mining sites in that county are illustrated in Figure 2. A complete list of Washington coal mine maps available for download from the Washington Department of Natural Resources can be accessed at: <https://fortress.wa.gov/>

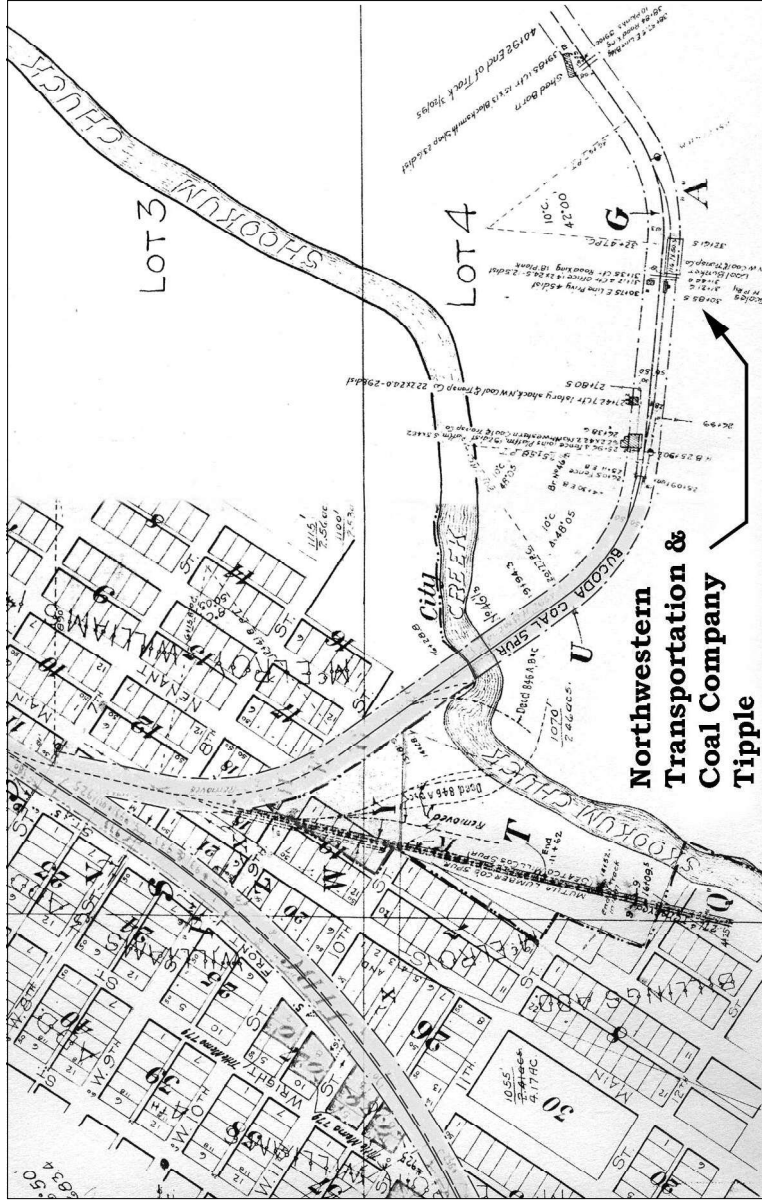


Figure 3. Bucoda and location of coal tipple (a place where railcars were loaded with coal). Right-of-Way Plat Map produced by the Northern Pacific Railroad about 1895.

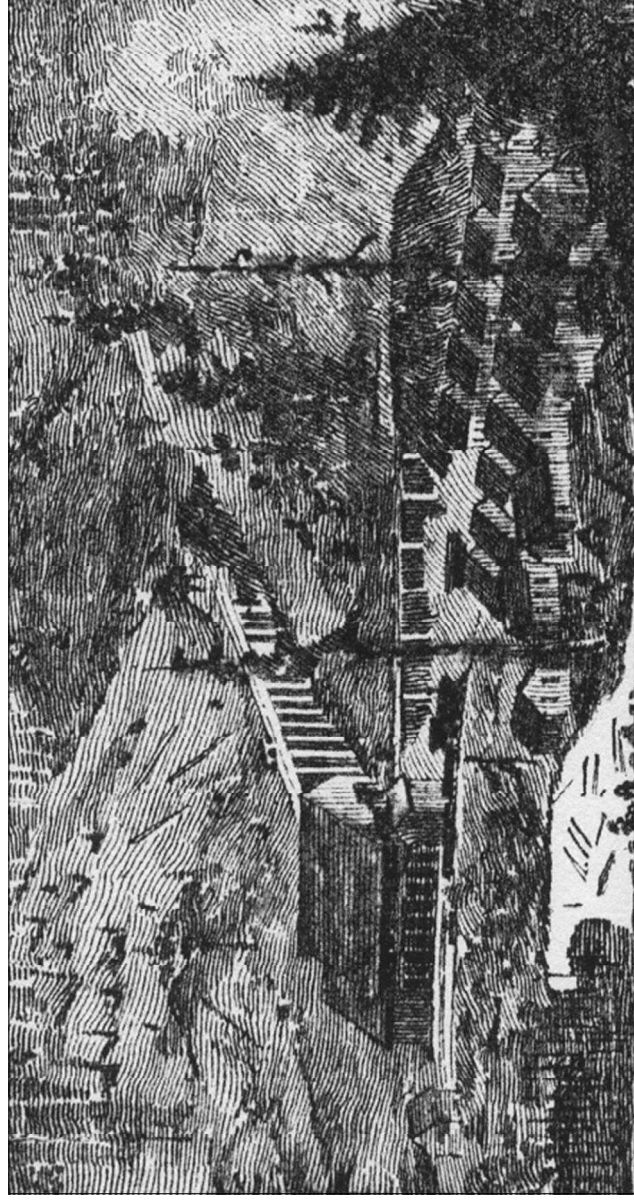
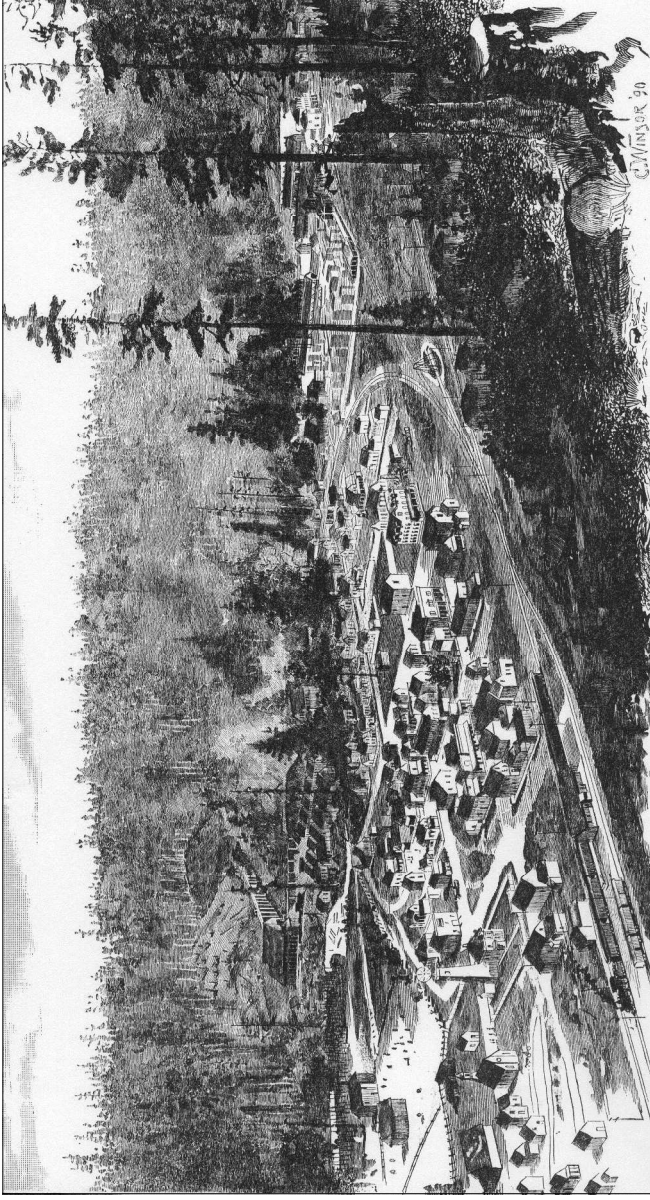
[dnr/adminsa/DataWeb/coalmine
maps.htm](http://dnr/adminsa/DataWeb/coalminemaps.htm)>.

BUCODA MINES

The earliest commercial mine at Bucoda was opened at a time when the community was still called Seatco. In 1877, the Territorial Legislature contracted to house prisoners at a new penitentiary in Seatco. That facility was owned by a consortium consisting of Oliver Shead, William Billings (Thurston County Sheriff), and Jeremiah K. Smith (a former Pierce County Sheriff). Shead contributed land and

the lumber used for buildings. Many of the prisoners who were confined there between 1878 and 1887 were forced into unpaid labor in a sawmill owned by Shead. Commencing in 1880,² inmates were also required to work in the consortium's nearby coal mine. Later, that mine became inactive, but it was reopened in 1887 under the ownership of the Northwestern Coal & Transportation Company.

The Northwestern Coal & Transportation Company was the recipient of a spur (called the Bucoda Coal Spur) from the Northern Pacific Railroad in



Top: Figure 4. Bucoda as seen in an etching from the May 1890 issue of Northwest Magazine.

Bottom: Figure 5. Enlargement of Figure 4 showing the Bucoda Coal Spur and the Northwestern Transportation & Coal Company's mine and tippie.

the fall of 1886. Although the switch at this location was present for almost 70 years, the track scheme of the associated spur changed radically over time. The Bucoda Coal Company was organized in October 1889. Its only initial function was to act as the Portland agent for the sale of coal produced by the Northwestern mine.

The Bucoda Coal Spur and the Northwestern Coal & Transportation Company tippie, where coal was loaded into rail cars, are visible in Figure 3. Bucoda appeared in the 1890 magazine article illustration seen in Figure 4, and the area of the tippie is enlarged in Figure 5. The mine produced low

quality coal, and operated sporadically. It closed permanently after 1895. Figure 6, produced in 1896, confirms that the mine was inactive. However, the Bucoda Coal Company Spur continued to exist.

An appeal heard by the Washington Supreme Court in 1893 provides insight into Bucoda mine conditions of that era. The case under appeal involved a boy of thirteen years, who was employed by the mine as a screener in March of 1888, when he was injured. He testified that "Ismay, the superintendent, called me and his son, a boy of my own age, from the place where we were working, to run a

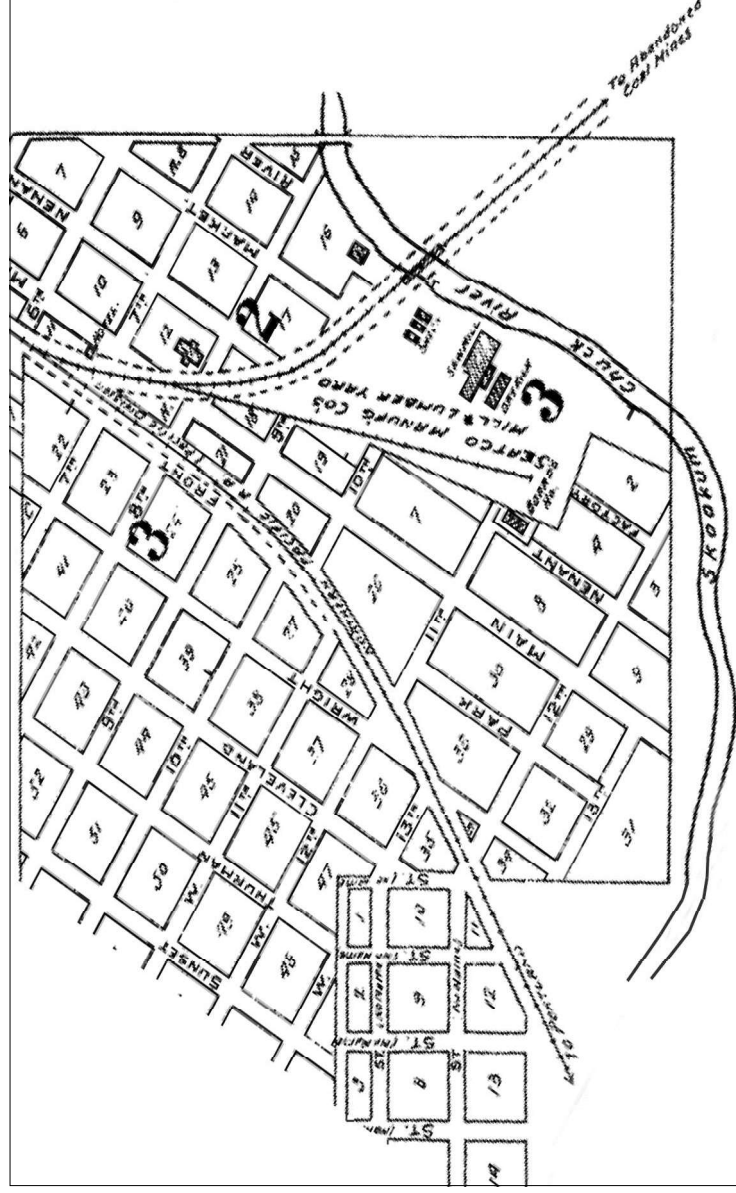


Figure 6. This 1896 map notes the "abandoned coal mines" at lower right. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Bucoda.

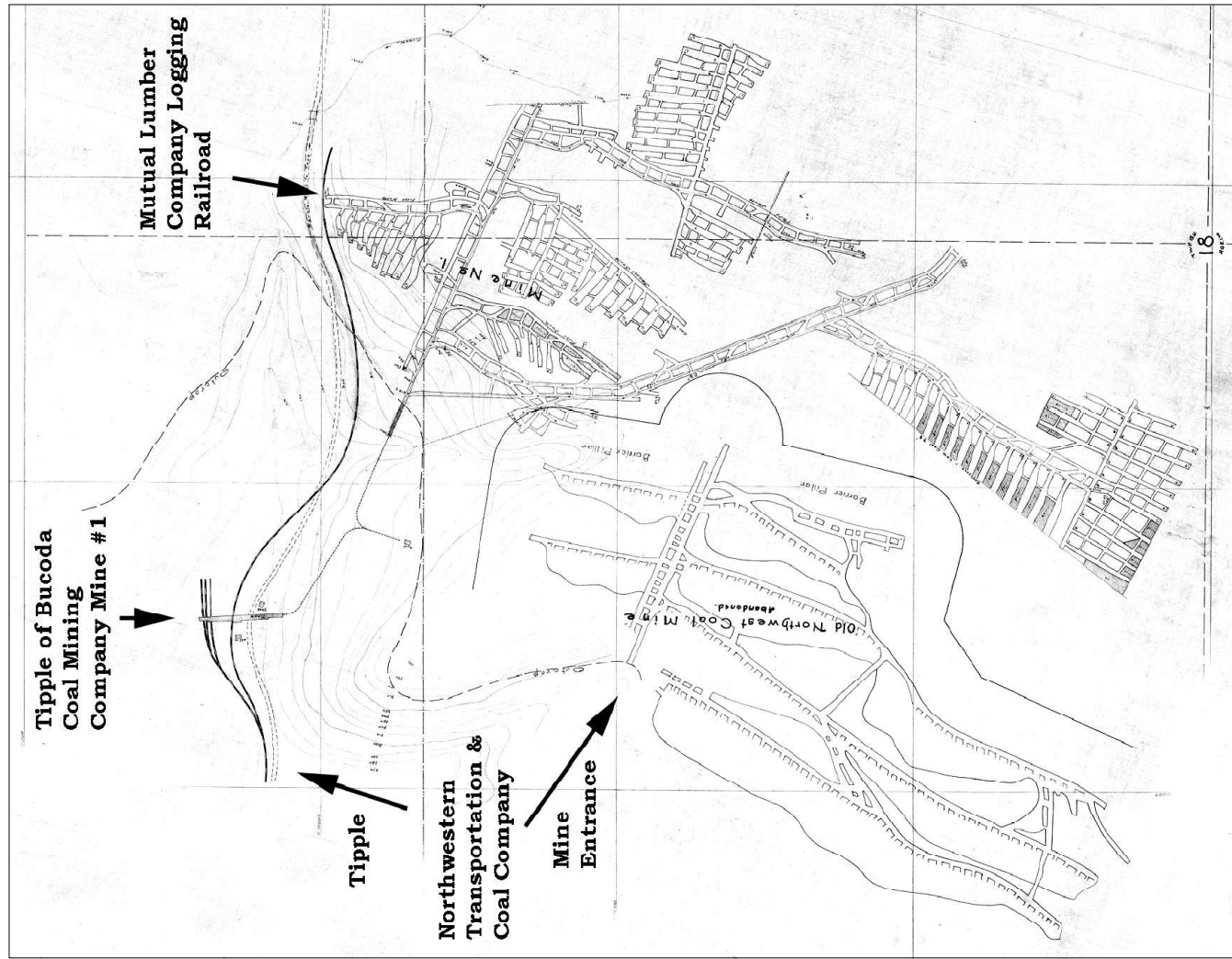


Figure 7. Gallery configuration of two coal mines at Bucoda. Map designed T2_B and produced May 11, 1925 by the Washington Department of Natural Resources.

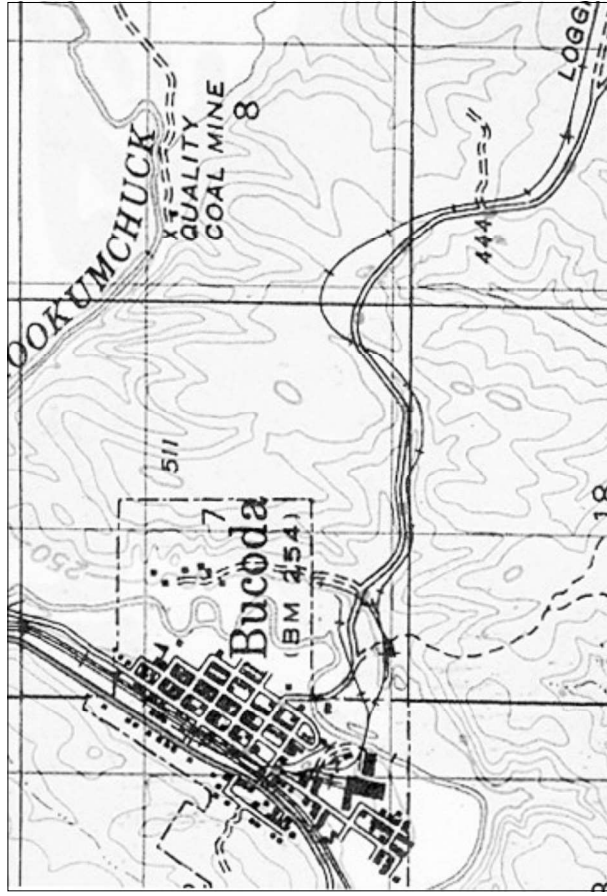


Figure 8. Bucoda, the Mutual Lumber Company Logging Railroad, and the Quality Coal Mine, from a 1927 Army Corps of Engineer's Map.

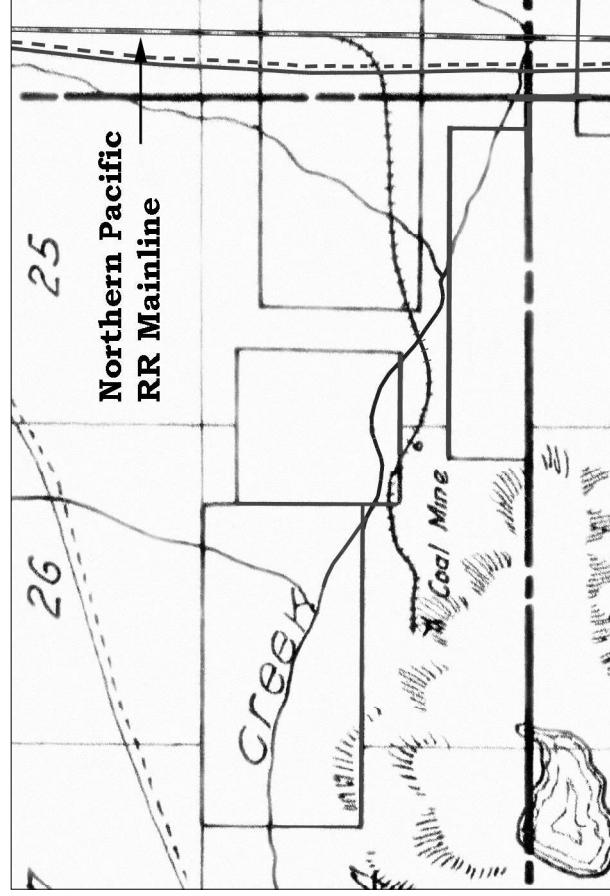


Figure 9. Great Western Coal Development & Mining Company Spur from Washington Utilities & Transportation Commission Case File #43, dated 1910.

few cars down to the scales to weigh them. He gave me a stick to put in the brake of the car so I could manage it. He said: 'Take this stick and drop that car down; the brake is not good.' I knew nothing about the brake. Had run other cars down the same way, but not with a stick. Put the stick through the spokes of the brake wheel and used it as a lever. The other boy helped by taking hold of the other side of the wheel. We let the car down about twenty feet to the scales. I put my whole weight against the stick and it broke, and I fell upon the ground in front of the car and was stunned, as I struck on my head. Knew nothing more until I got out from under the car and

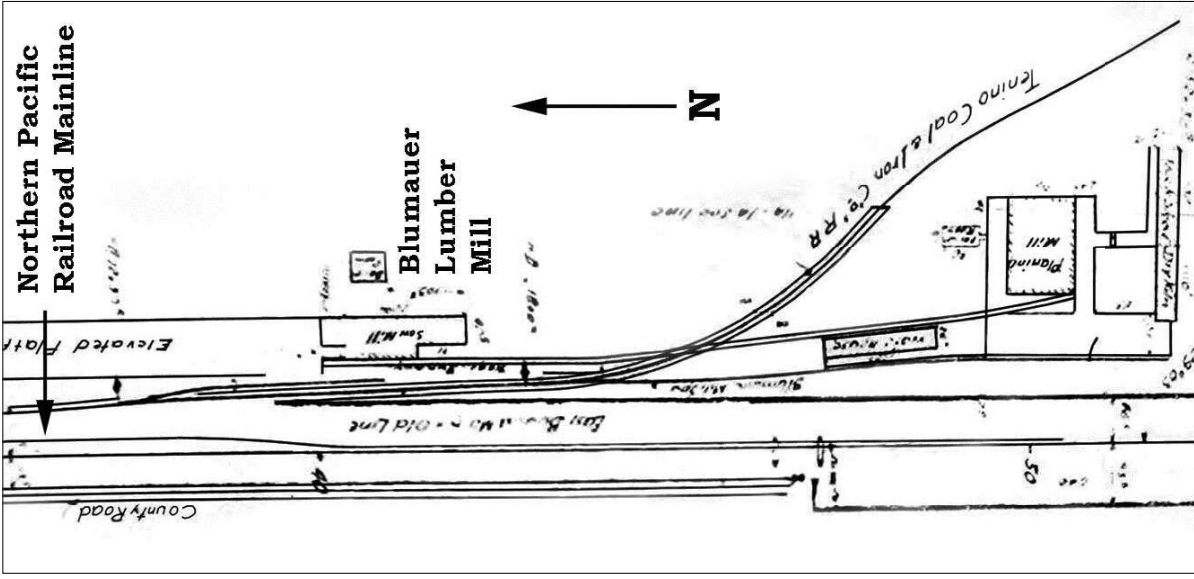


Figure 10. Origin of the Tenino Coal & Iron Company spur, from a post-1904 Northern Pacific Railroad Plat Map of the area immediately south of Tenino.

and he took me on his back and carried me home. When my father came in he was blaming me for it, and Ismay said: 'Don't blame the boy; I was to blame for it. I told him to brake the car down, and gave him the stick to brake it down with.'

Under cross examination, the boy said, "The car was not running fast. The front truck only passed over me; then it stopped. It was necessary to have the brakes set to keep cars from running down. We loosened the brake, then the car started, ran about its own length and stopped. [I] Had been discharged and reemployed by the company twice before the accident, and again afterward. Ismay said the first two times that it was because I was lazy; the last time was because I was not able-bodied. Was not in the habit of leaving my work and getting on the cars for a ride. Didn't know that anyone was behind the car pinching it ahead with a crowbar. There might have been another car behind the one I was on. If the stick had not been rotten I would not have fallen." ³ Obviously, great improvements in workplace safety and child labor law have taken place since this incident occurred.

Coal mining resumed near Bucoda in 1914. The Bucoda Coal Company began to produce coal there itself, no longer serving merely as a sales agent. The Sunshine Mine, subsequently designated as the Bucoda Coal Company Mine #1, was located immediately north and east of the old Northwestern Mine. There is reason to believe that Ralph Graham and a brother, to-

found my hand crushed. Ismay was there within ten or fifteen feet of me,



Figure 11. 1909 view of the spur from the Blumaier Logging Company Railroad to the bunker of the Black Bear Mine. Asahel Curtis, photographer. Photo to courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, A. Curtis 15130.

gether called the Graham Brothers, operated the Sunshine Mine in 1915. Mine #1 appears in Figure 7, part of a 1923 Department of Natural Resources map. Figure 8 is a 1927 Army Corps of Engineers map which demonstrates that the original bridge over the Skookumchuck River, used by the Bucoda Coal Spur, had been replaced

by another bridge a bit farther to the south. Circa 1919, the Mutual Lumber Company railroad began operating over the Bucoda Coal Spur, which passed through the Bucoda Coal Company tippie. A precise date for the closure of Mine #1 has not been ascertained. It was no longer operating in 1943.⁴

GREAT WESTERN MINE

The Great Western Coal Development and Mining Company opened its mine in 1903. It was located approximately two miles southwest of Tenino; the entrance was placed at the base of a small hill, where there was an outcropping of coal.⁵ The company leased a right-of-way between the mine and the mainline of the Northern Pacific Railroad; rails used on that right-of-way were leased from Railway and Steel Supply Company. Figure 9 shows the position of the mine, in Section 35 of Township 16 North, Range 2 West.

The mine was operated vigorously for a couple of years and then diminished. The Pacific Coast Coal Company worked the mine in 1907; later the Keystone Coal Company was the operator. Finally, the King Coal Mining Company worked there for one year

before a receiver was appointed for the bankrupt mine's assets.⁶ W. D. Hofius & Company, of Seattle, purchased those assets and resold them in 1911 to Franklin Umstead of Chicago. The inventory included 890 30-foot rails, 50 mine cars, one small locomotive in poor condition, eight houses in good condition, seventeen houses in poor condition, the railroad right-of-way, and ties. After 1911, the eastern part of the right-of-way was reused by Polehn Brothers, who were setting up a lumber mill approximately 0.75 mile southeast of the mine entrance. That lumbering operation became the Badger Lumber Company in 1916.

BLACK BEAR MINE

The Tenino Coal & Iron Company leased coal-mining rights south of Tenino from Isaac Blumauer in 1904. Blumauer retained the right to operate a logging railroad over the leased property. Subsequently, the

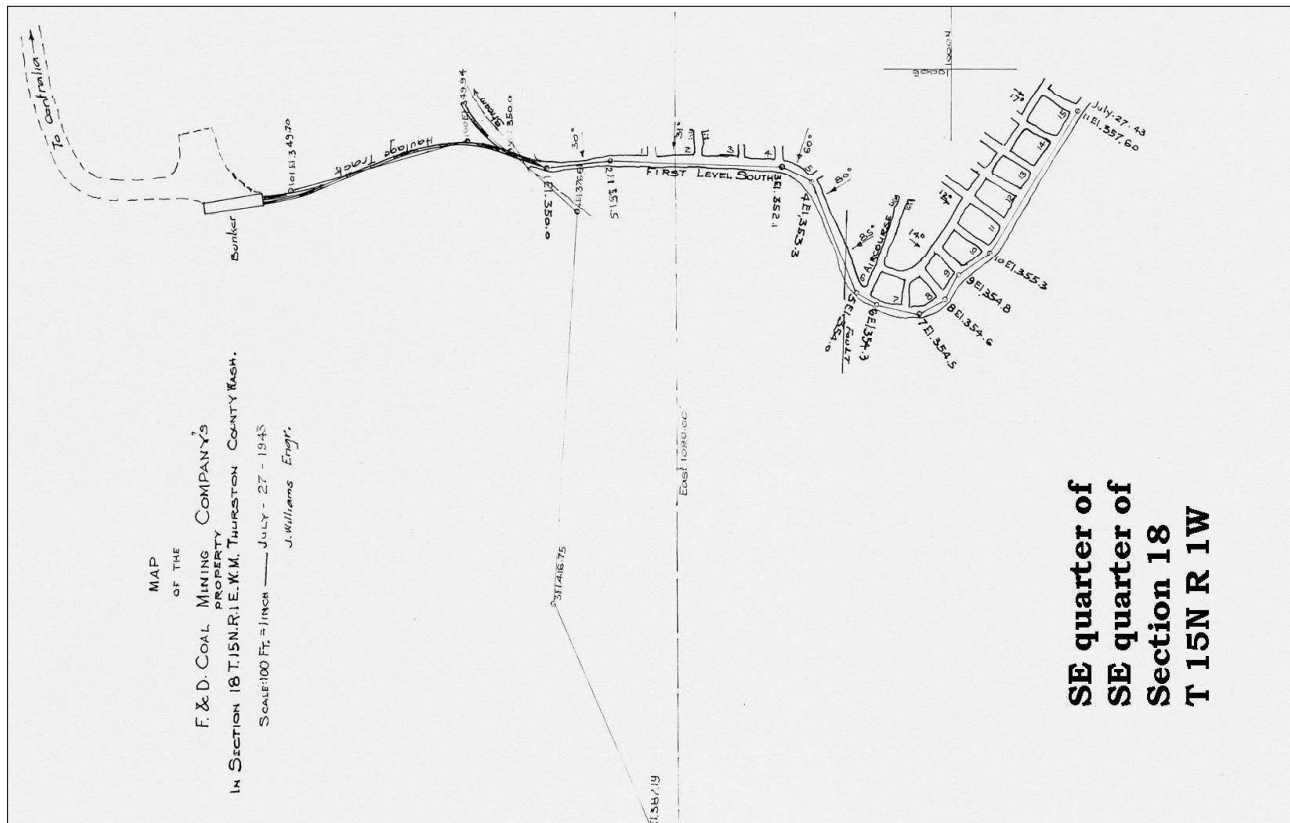
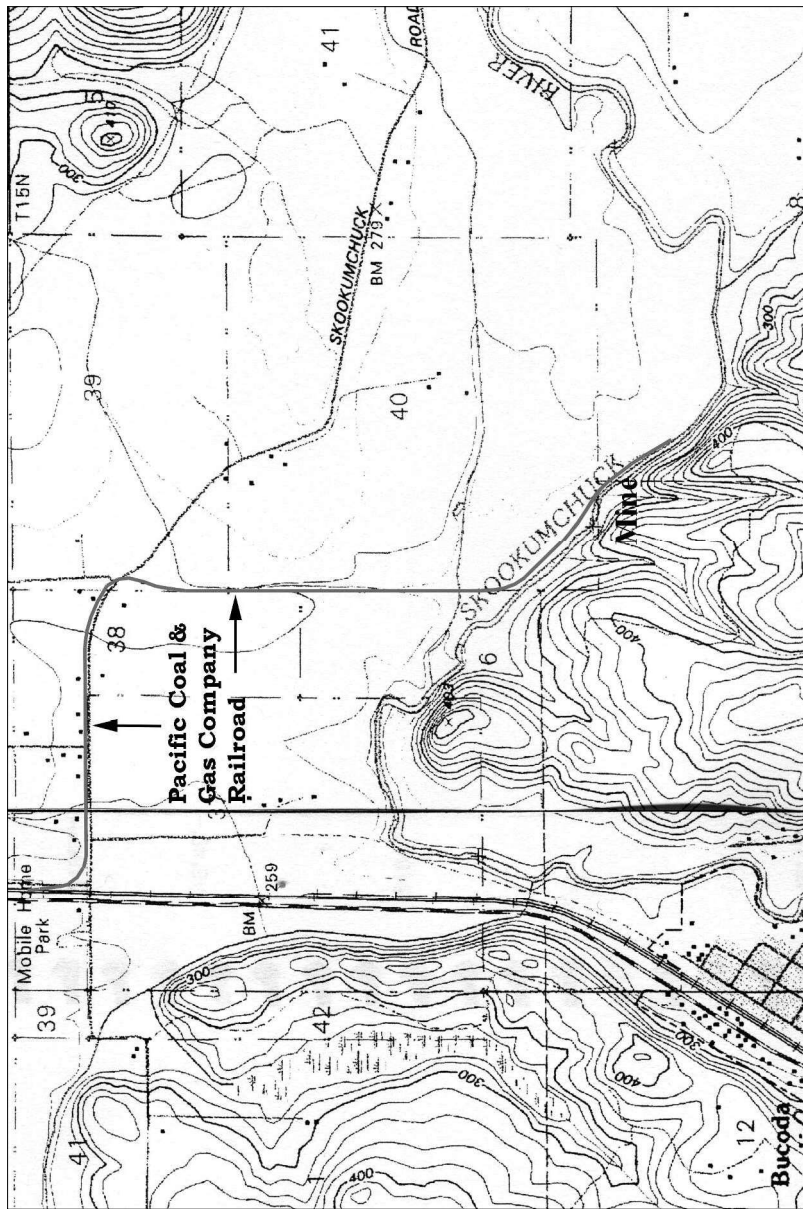
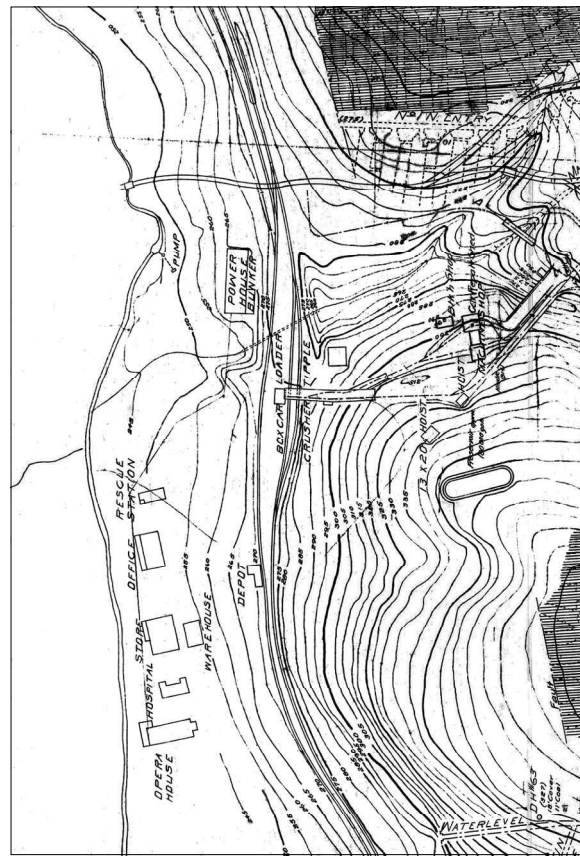


Figure 12. The F & D Coal Mining Company's property (previously operated as the Majestic Mine). Map produced July 27, 1943 and designated as T7_A, from the Washington Department of Natural Resources.



Above: Figure 13. Author's map of the Skookumchuck Mine and the Pacific Coal & Gas Company Railroad, with a U.S. Geological Service Topographical map as background.



Left: Figure 14. Structures at Tono of the Washington Union Coal Company's Hannaford Mine #1, from a Department of Natural Resources map updated to 1947.



Figure 15. View of the tipple at Washington Union Coal Company at Tono, looking east. Photograph by Asahel Curtis, 1909. Photo courtesy of University of Washington, Special Collections, Asahel Curtis Collection, A. Curtis 15082.

Northern Pacific Railroad put in a spur for the use of the Coal & Iron Company. A diagram of that spur is presented in Figure 10. With access to the Northern Pacific assured, the Black Bear Mine opened in 1907. Its approximate site is visible in Figure 2, although a Washington Geological Survey publication locates it in the *northeast quarter* of Section 31, Township 16 North, Range 1 West.⁷ The mine's bunker is seen in Figure 11. The Tenino Coal & Iron Company operated at this site for two years. In 1911, Graham Brothers opened a new slope there.

MAJESTIC MINE

Farther southeast along the logging railroad built by Isaac Blumauer, the Majestic Mine began producing coal in 1911. It appears in Figure 2, and was located in the southwest quarter of Section 18, Township 15 North, Range 1 East. The mine operated only during 1911.⁸ Mining in that area resumed years later by the F & D Mining Company, operated by John Fusco. By that time, the logging railroad was gone and output must have come out by truck. Figure 12 illustrates the mine's configuration in 1943.



Figure 16. View of the Washington Union Coal Company operation at Tono, with the town of Tono in the background. Photograph by Asahel Curtis, 1909. Photo courtesy of University of Washington, Special Collections, Asahel Curtis Collection, A. Curtis 15084.

SKOOKUMCHUCK MINE

The Pacific Coal & Gas Company began removing coal from its mine by September of 1910. It is unclear when this location became known as the Skookumchuck Mine. The mine entrance was on the southwest side of the Skookumchuck River, in the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 8, Township 15 North, Range 1 West. In 1911, the

company built a railroad, 9,600 feet in length, from the Northern Pacific mainline to its coal bunker; the bunker was located on the northeast side of the river, opposite the mine entrance. Figure 13 outlines the course of this track. The Pacific Coal & Gas Company was out of business by 1916, as was its short railroad. Figure 8 suggests that in 1927, the Quality Coal Mine was located on the same vein of coal, approximately 0.25 miles



Figure 17. The town site of Tono in 2010. Photo courtesy of author.

southeast of the opening for the Skookumchuck Mine. In a 2001 interview, Lyle Schultz reported that during his lifetime, an open-pit coal mine was in use at the site of the old Skookumchuck Mine.

TONO MINE

The Washington Union Coal Company, at Tono, was an auxiliary of the Union Pacific Railroad. In 1909, that railroad built a branch line to Tono. The coal company supplied fuel used by Union

Pacific locomotives in western Washington. In addition, a couple of logging railroads operated successively from the eastern end of the Tono Branch, and a moderate-sized community grew up around the mine at Tono. Figure 14 provides a detailed look at the structures in place at Tono. Figure 15 is a view east, toward the company's coal-loading tippie. The Town of Tono, as well as the tippie, can be seen in the view to the northwest reproduced in Figure 16. Figure 17 is a 2010 photograph of the same area, taken by the

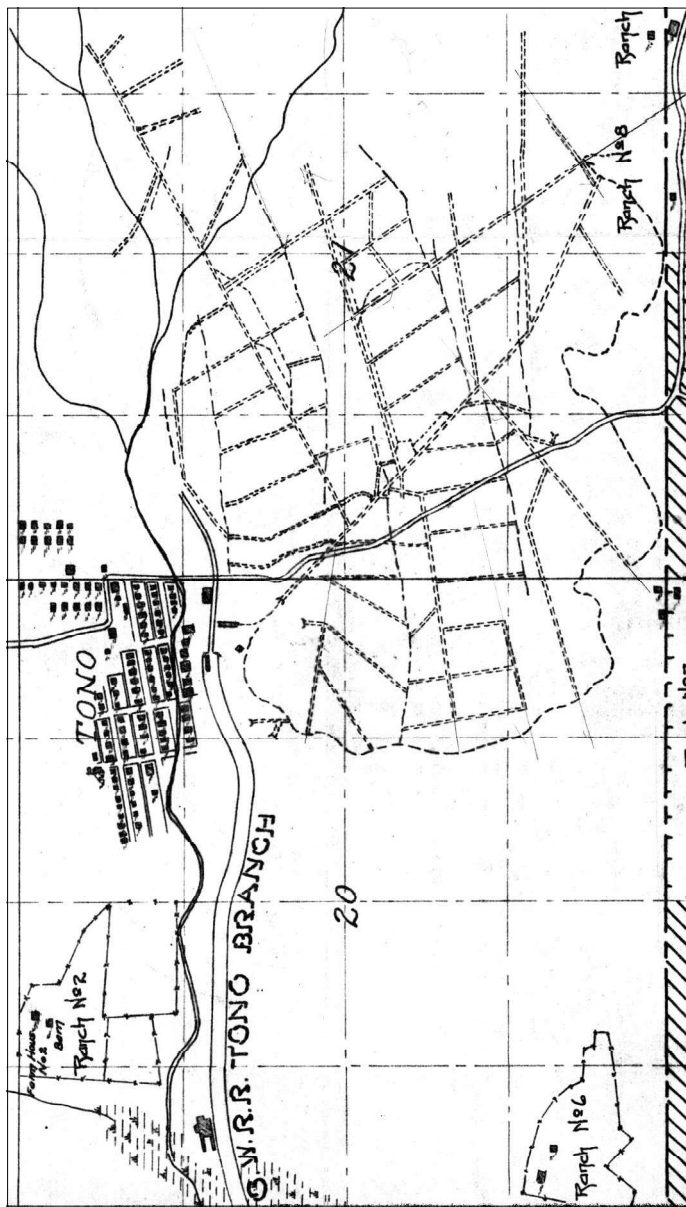


Figure 18. Pre-1929 Washington Department of Natural Resources map showing the Tono seam being worked by the Washington Union Coal Company. "O. W. R. R. Tono Branch" designates the Union Pacific Railroad branch to the mine.

author, from Tono Road. The extensive system of coal galleries at Tono are evident in Figure 18. The use of coal by the Union Pacific Railroad gradually diminished as the railroad began the conversion to diesel engines. Its branch to Tono was removed in 1957.

For several reasons the number of houses at Tono diminished over the years. Automobile use meant that workers no longer had to live in town. Some of the residences were moved to other locations. By the 1970s, only the former superintendent's home remained occupied.⁹

Toward the end of the Tono mine's operating life, underground removal of coal at the mine ceased, and further production was accomplished by strip mining. That activity destroyed most traces of the town's existence.

Twenty-first Century concerns about the environment make it unlikely that there will be a resurgence in the use of coal, even though large reserves of that material are still in the ground locally. But the imprint of that industry on the land can still occasionally be seen.

NOTES

¹ Henry Landes, *Washington Geological Survey, Volume II, Annual Report for 1902*. Tacoma: Pioneer Bindery and Printing Company, 1903, page 238.

² Landes, page 239.

³ Guley versus Northwestern Coal & Transportation Company. 7 Wash. 491, No. 978. Washington Supreme Court. Decided December 28, 1893.

⁴ Stephen H. Green, *Report of Investigations No. 4—Coal and Coal Mining in Washington*. Division of Mines and Mining. Olympia: State Printing Plant, 1943.

⁵ Landes, page 239.

⁶ Harold E. Culver, *The Coal Fields of Southwest Washington—Bulletin No. 19*. Olympia: Washington Geological Survey, Frank M. Lamborn, Public Printer, 1919, page 82.

⁷ Culver, page 82.

⁸ Culver, page 83.

⁹ Emmett O’Connell, “Tono—Ghost Town with a Ghost Landscape.” <http://www.thurstontalk.com/2013/10/29/tono-ghost-town-ghost-landscape/> (accessed July 5, 2017).

Dr. Hannum is a retired physician and surgeon who spent his early years in Michigan. He arrived in western Washington in 1971 as a member of the U.S.

Public Health Service. Railroad history has been a life-long interest, and he has written several books on the subject.